



# An Analysis of Countermeasures and College Freshman's Psychological Changes in Various Stages

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes the four stages of psychological changes that college freshman go through after enrollment: excitement and anxiety dominant stage, interest dominant stage, calm adjustment stage, confusion and reflection stage, supporting any countermeasures on about cultivation sense of belonging, regulating behavior and conceptual cognitive guidance in response to psychological changes to shorten the time for college freshmen to integrate into college life.

**Keywords:** college freshman, psychology, sense of belonging, values

## 1 Introduction

In our perception, entering college generally is seen as a new beginning. Therefore, parents, college students themselves, and society all have different expectations and concerns for college freshmen from different perspectives and to varying degrees. Combined with changes in living and learning environments, social circles, and other factors, these can lead to complex psychological changes in college freshmen. Some scholars refer to the stage where college freshmen leave their parents and start living independently as "the second weaning period".<sup>[1]</sup> As the author, I believe that understanding the psychological changes in college freshmen and helping them shorten the adaptation period after entering college is crucial in helping them quickly adjust and start their college life.

## 2 The Characteristics for Psychological Changes in Freshmen

Freshmen who enter college campuses generally go through the following four stages of psychological changes.

### 2.1 Stage 1: Dominated by Excitement and Anxiety

"Entering college" as a significant life event can trigger stress reactions in freshmen. The form and intensity of these stress reactions may vary slightly due to individual

personality traits, living environment, and other factors. However, common manifestations include excitement and anxiety, which tend to persist for a long considerable period of time after the freshmen start their college journey.

The excitement and anxiety stem from the joy of successfully passing the college entrance examination and the curiosity about the new environment, as well as the unpredictability of unknown things and future life. This state of anxiety often decreases or disappears gradually as freshmen become more familiar with the university. The specific reasons for this psychological phenomenon are:

### ***2.1.1 Curiosity and Comparison***

Today, many students already start living in boarding schools during their middle and high school years, and with the use of the internet, incoming college freshmen already have some knowledge about the university they will be attending. However, compared to their previous experiences, college marks the beginning of a new lifestyle for them. They will need to adapt to a new school environment, make new friends, and develop new habits, among other things. Therefore, it is still a novelty for college freshmen, which arouses their curiosity.<sup>[2]</sup>

In addition to the novelty, college freshmen also experience a sense of comparison. This comparison initially manifests as comparing the physical environment of the new school with their expectations of a college environment or with other college campuses.<sup>[3]</sup> Those who meet their expectations of the school tend to feel excited, while those who have deviations from their expectations may feel a sense of disappointment or loss. Especially with the development of modern means of communication, such as mobile devices, it has become easier and faster for high school classmates to exchange information with each other, which facilitates the rapid realization of these horizontal comparisons between schools.

Furthermore, there is also a vertical comparison. The modern facilities and equipment in high schools today have diminished the novelty for many students, especially those from first and second-tier cities. If the disappointment in hardware expectations is not compensated by the software environment, it can lead to low mood, frustration, anxiety, and even a decrease in motivation for learning in some students.<sup>[4]</sup>

### ***2.1.2 Independence and Affinity***

Curiosity and comparison are relative to the environment, while independence and affinity are manifested in interpersonal interactions. Independence is reflected in the perspective of parent-child relationships. Many college freshmen begin to contemplate their own independence, and some individuals feel relieved and think, "Finally, no one is controlling me."<sup>[5]</sup> This shift in self-awareness inevitably brings excitement and anxiety to young people.<sup>[6]</sup> Although a considerable number of students have already started living on campus, I believe that true independence begins with college. At this stage, college freshmen establish their own social circles in a new environment. Therefore, they may still exhibit varying degrees of anxiety.

Another reason for anxiety comes from the need for affinity. The unfamiliarity of the new environment leads college students to seek companionship. Although the abundance of communication tools such as WeChat and Weibo allow new students to stay connected with old friends, to some extent reducing the level of anxiety, the need for face-to-face interaction in reality still causes anxiety due to the sense of unfamiliarity. Finding psychological resonance through companionship can help alleviate anxiety by experiencing social support, and making new friends can also bring excitement.

## **2.2 Stage 2: Interest-Driven Stage**

As freshmen gain a better understanding of the school environment and develop deeper connections with new friends, their need for affinity is fulfilled. The richness of college life, including class elections, cultural and sports activities, and various club recruitments, allows students in this stage to be driven by their interests and hobbies. They actively participate in activities that they find interesting.

Physiological studies have shown that after intense muscle tension completes an action potential, the muscles enter a state of relaxation. Similarly, there is a psychological phenomenon of relaxation after completing an intensely stressful "action". The end of the college entrance examination marks the completion of an extremely tense "action" event in the minds of the candidates, thus entering university and starting college life unconsciously becomes a phase of relaxation after the stress of the college entrance examination. The phrase "Study hard, get into college and everything will be easy"<sup>[7]</sup> also contributes to the relaxed mindset of college freshmen. Currently, in many high schools, there are very few things that high school seniors can do based on their own interests. At this stage, relaxation is not only an opportunity for college freshmen to engage in social activities but also a potential temptation for some individuals to become lax and complacent. Therefore, it is necessary to guide this stage appropriately, avoiding an excessive focus on interests without restrictions, especially to prevent the negative impact of excessive engagement in online gaming on the smooth adaptation of college freshmen to their first-year academic life.

## **2.3 Stage 3: Calm Adjustment Stage**

After satisfying their social and personal interests, college students tend to enter a relatively calm period psychologically. They begin to contemplate the academic needs they must fulfill as students, and thus, their desire for learning becomes stronger. With the normalization of extracurricular activities, the lives of college freshmen become more structured and orderly. They start studying new courses and have a strong thirst for new knowledge. At the beginning of the semester, their attendance and engagement in class are generally good as they enter the adjustment period following the intense and relaxed stage. The calm stage often reflects habitual behavior, so it is crucial for students to maintain autonomous learning behavior in college without the demands of parents or teachers. Learning becomes a habitual behavior for most freshmen, which they can maintain well. However, there may be a few students who become obsessed

with online games, and in such cases, the calm and habitual behavior becomes a significant risk factor that affects their adaptation to college. The behavioral manifestations during the calm adjustment stage will have an impact on the future cognition and behavior of freshmen.

#### **2.4 Stage 4: Confusion and Reflection Stage**

On one hand, college freshmen are heavily influenced by the external environment. They gather various information about their major from seniors and fellow students from the same hometown, such as by external factors, they will obtain various information about their major from seniors and fellow students. This includes information about the teaching and attendance of relevant teachers, as well as exams and employment prospects.<sup>[8]</sup> Once they receive results that are not ideal and do not align with their expectations, they may experience confusion and a lack of motivation to study. On the other hand, students in this age group begin to contemplate issues related to their self-esteem, self-needs, self-evaluation, and self-worth. Strong self-awareness, in the absence of guidance, can lead to spontaneity and biases. They start pondering questions such as why they are studying and the importance of finding a good job in the future. However, the focus on finding a good job may be narrow and vague, without considering the broader social context and their own personal development. Therefore, it is crucial to provide correct theoretical guidance on issues related to "self" in relation to family, school, society, and the nation. This will help prevent cognitive dissonance and guide students away from misconceptions that could hinder the formation of a correct worldview.

### **3 Basis for Dealing with Psychological Changes**

#### **3.1 Meeting Needs**

Firstly, meeting the need for affiliation. The need for affiliation, often referred to as affiliation motivation, refers to the inner desire of individuals to avoid loneliness and establish cooperative and friendly connections with others. When college freshmen arrive in a unfamiliar environment, their sense of loneliness is heightened, thus their desire to be with others becomes particularly evident.<sup>[9]</sup>

Next is meeting the need for social interaction. Human interaction is not just about escaping the objective state of isolation from others, but more importantly, it is about overcoming loneliness. Loneliness is the subjective discomfort experienced when individuals lack certain important features in their social relationships.<sup>[10]</sup> In other words, after meeting the need for affiliation and being with others, as individuals in social relationships, college freshmen inevitably need to establish various closer interpersonal relationships through social interactions to alleviate subjective discomfort and foster a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, meeting the need for cognition is important. Humans have a natural desire to explore and understand things, as well as a desire to solve challenging problems. Through the process of exploring things, individuals satisfy their own learning needs and subsequently solve problems to fulfill their self-esteem and demonstrate their self-worth. Meeting cognitive needs deepens the sense of identity and belonging for college freshmen in terms of their understanding of the school and future career prospects.

### **3.2 Ability Identity**

Individuals often express their self-worth through the identification of their abilities. The university stage is an important period for individual self-development. So, they pay great attention to their ability to be recognized by their elders, teachers and classmates. Ability acquisition can be achieved through direct reinforcement, vicarious reinforcement, and self-reinforcement. Direct reinforcement occurs when an individual's behavior is immediately followed by positive or negative stimuli. Vicarious reinforcement, on the other hand, involves individuals being reinforced by observing the behavior of role models and the outcomes they receive from that behavior, influencing their own behavioral tendencies. Self-reinforcement occurs when individuals use societal behavior standards and their own understanding to positively or negatively reinforce their own behavioral performance. Through positive reinforcement, individuals gain corresponding attitudes and abilities, which, when recognized and acknowledged by others, can lead to positive self-evaluation, self-esteem, and self-worth in university freshmen.

## **4 Suggestion**

To adapt to college life, new students need to embrace the school's ethos and academic atmosphere, integrate into the campus culture, develop a sense of belonging and identity, and embrace the spiritual values advocated by the institution. During the process of adapting to the new environment, universities should focus on meeting the needs and recognizing the abilities of new students, and work on promoting mutual influence and interaction among emotions, conceptual cognition, and behavior.

### **4.1 Emotional Perspective**

#### ***4.1.1 Cultivate "my university."***

With the current use of the mobile Internet, freshmen can learn information from various angles through multiple channels and in various ways. As a result, the information received is complicated and difficult to form a stable attitude and emotion. This requires leading information. By introducing the general situation of the school, we can make students understand the history, development and future planning of the school

in the shortest and authoritative way, reduce the anxiety of freshmen due to unfamiliarity, and avoid the bias of ideas and attitudes of freshmen from other channels. Promote the students' original "home-me" relationship to "school-me" transformation, quickly into the school family; Through understanding the history and culture of the school, we can have a sense of belonging and identity. The author thinks that the introduction of school history and the visit of the employment-related units are one of the better ways to relieve anxiety, meanwhile, the introduction of school history and the visit of the relevant departments as a recessive education way will affect the college students' vocational identity and career development plan. For example, organizing new students to visit airports and airlines can accelerate their professional identification and sense of belonging.

#### ***4.1.2 Play the Function of the Community***

The influence of student-worker activities and community activities is more recessive education. This is in line with the characteristics of a considerable number of young people do not like preaching, many students join clubs because of their interest and hobbies, and have a positive attitude and loyalty to the activities of clubs. The activities of the community organization accord with the psychological characteristics and behavior habits of the university students, so on the one hand, it can stimulate the independent consciousness and sense of belonging of the university students, on the other hand, it can have the effect of cultivating the concept, in the activities implicitly promote the university students to identify with the campus culture, internalize the values of the university students and guide the behavior.

## **4.2 Behavioral Perspective**

#### ***4.2.1 Military Training and System Regulation***

On the one hand, from the perspective of college students' psychological needs, the communication during military training satisfies the needs of freshmen to understand the environment and make friends. At the same time, in the intense training process, the cooperation produces a strong sense of belonging, which has played an effect that other ways cannot achieve. On the other hand, military training, as a better means of behavior training, can standardize individual behavior. The military training reflects the school spirit, discipline and culture of a school, and makes the freshmen integrate into the campus life in the education of behavior norms that imperceptibly influence the school, and cultivate good habits for the future life and study. Third, it can enable the individual to generate cognition in behavior. Behavioral education is a kind of general recessive education, which forms the viewpoints and views of things in behavior habits, forms the cognition and self-reflection in behavior comparison, and also includes the reflection on school and interpersonal relationship.

### ***4.2.2 Cultivating Self-Discipline in Behavior***

Many examples of college students have proven that self-discipline in behavior is a guarantee of success. Some college freshmen lack self-discipline in their behavior, especially in their studies. While they have the desire to learn, they often lack self-control, leading to irregular study habits, last-minute cramming for exams, and low attendance in classes. Therefore, it is necessary to mobilize college students' self-awareness and combine external constraints with self-discipline. Addressing the phenomenon of young people following their peers and imitating older students, it is important to utilize strong reinforcement and identify role models among college students, leveraging their influence to guide and encourage new students to regulate their own behavior. By improving relevant regulations and utilizing college students' strong self-awareness, the school can set behavioral goals that students voluntarily adhere to, with regular tracking and evaluation. Through self-reinforcement and direct reinforcement, the combination of self-discipline and external constraints can be achieved, cultivating the ability of new college students to autonomously regulate their behavior. Implementing mechanisms such as morning routines and study check-ins can promote the development of good habits among college students.

### **4.3 Cognitive Perspective**

Freshmen should not only have positive feelings, but also have clear concept cognition to adapt to college life. The characteristics of freshmen's psychological changes reflect a rule that in the psychological characteristics of human's motivation needs, interests, hobbies, ideals and beliefs, the stable mental level, the diesel and ideals and beliefs, etc. are used as spiritual energy to maintain individual behavior for a long time. Therefore, we must combine the psychological changes of freshmen to carry on the cognitive education of life value, ideal and belief, and must be realized through the explicit education, especially in the confused stage of college students, it is necessary to give clear ideal and belief education. This should give full play to professional teachers, psychological counseling and other educational teaching and auxiliary means to promote the cognition of freshmen.

## **5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is important to provide timely guidance and support for the transitional psychological changes that occur in college freshmen after enrollment, enabling them to adapt quickly to the college environment and interpersonal interactions. Meanwhile, the growth of college students needs coordination and cooperation of all aspects, and the use of explicit education and recessive education and other means to achieve "three-round education", finally help the freshmen to pass the transition period smoothly, adapt to and open university life.

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